

The Black Spirituals

PART II - JOY IN STRUGGLE

The spirituals were rooted or grounded in hard, bitter and inescapable realities of Black American enslavement. Hence the notion of a "pie in the sky by-and-by" orientation of the Black spirituals is largely a fiction based upon a false comprehension of the outlook of the enslaved community. Its hope or confidence came from a looking through and beyond what was immediately seen but not "after the immediate," as on a time scale.

Joy and conflict were intertwined. Conflict marked a journey in which the company of the angelic or heavenly hosts were not so much ultimate but immediate help mates and companions. The Black spiritual, "Singin' Wid a Sword In Ma Hand", illustrates this mixture of consonance of joy and conflict.

Singin' wid a sword in ma han', Lord
Singin' wid a sword in ma han', Lord
Singin' wid a sword in ma han', Lord
Singin' wid a sword in ma han'.

Purtest singin' ever I heard
Way ovah on de hill
De angels sing an' I sing too,
Singin' wid a sword in ma han', Lord,
Singin' wid a sword in ma han', Lord,
Singin' wid a sword in ma han'.

The extra versus of this spiritual contain the key lines:

Purtest preachin' ever I heard
Way ovah on de hill,
De angels preach an' I preach'd too,
Preachin' wid a sword in ma han', Lord,
etc....

Then, "Purtest prayin' ever I heard"
and "Purtest mournin' ever I heard"
comprise the theme lines of the concluding verses.

Here we see, first a constant joy which precedes, accompanies and gives a peculiarly insightful meaning to the early struggle or warfare in which a sword is always needed but where "we are compassed about" with all the cosmic forces or hosts of heaven.

Translated into modern philosophical and scientific terms, the enslaved Black community sensed that the cosmic order was and forever is on the side of those who struggle for right. Indeed, the cosmic order is right itself.

In this sense, the enslaved Black community in America preceded by a century and more the current philosophical and scientific recognition that the Natural Order, which is God's Reality, is the only substantive fact with which human life can other than chimerically (or as make-believe) deal.

The imagery of life as a confident journey, the end of which is the fulfillment of all that is right, good and true, it revealed in the spiritual, "Gwintar Sing All Along De Way."

Oh, I'm gwintar sing, gwintar sing,
Gwintar sing all along de way,
Oh, I'm a gwintar sing, gwintar sing,
Gwintar sing all along de way...
We'll shout o'er all our sorrows,
An' sing forever more,
With Christ an' all his army,
On dat celestial shore.

Life is seen here to have movement. But the movement is toward a goal which is not future but rather is eternal. Eternity, by definition, is not future but that which perpetually or forever is. Thus the hope-filled journey portrayed in the Black spirituals is not future-bound but is rather Eternal Reality-bound. What is eternal may be experienced even now. Therein lies the saving difference between the realistic and vibrant sense of the ever-present as opposed to a starry-eyed and often elusive futuristic hope.

Philosophically, the spirituals from the period of Black enslavement are consonant (or agree with) the best in current intellectual thought and doubtless have an even greater depth. They represent a proud heritage which we should ever seek to probe and understand.

(The next part, in this continuing series, will deal further with how the spirituals speak to our present culture.)

OBITUARIES

Jimmie B. Hunt died on February 6th, 1976 at his home, 5405 N.E. 10th. Hunt was born in Queen City, Texas and has lived in Portland for the last five years.

Hunt was employed as a torch burner for a box car company in Vancouver.

Survivors are: his wife, Katie R. Hunt; a son, Tommie; and two sisters, Rose Johnkin and Jessie Whetstone.

The funeral service is on Thursday, February 12th at 1:00 p.m. at New Hope Baptist Church. Interment will be at Willamette National Cemetery. Vann's Mortuary are directors.

Archbishop discusses liberation

Most Reverend Mark G. McGrath, C.S.C. Archbishop of Panama, will speak on "The Church in Latin American Liberation" at the University of Portland on Wednesday, February 18th at 8:00 p.m. His speech in Buckley Center Auditorium is part of the University's International Week observance and the public is invited.

Archbishop McGrath, who was born in the Canal Zone, was also ordained a Holy Cross priest in Panama in 1949. He studied at the Catholic University of Chile, University of Notre Dame, in Paris and in Rome before becoming rector of Holy Cross Seminary in Santiago in 1953. In 1959 he was named dean of the theology faculty of the Catholic University and in 1961 he was named auxiliary bishop of Panama. The new Diocese of Santiago de Veraguas in Panama was founded in 1964 and he was made the first bishop. In 1969 he was made Archbishop of Panama.

A social development plan in Veraguas which was initiated by him has now become the pattern for the entire country. His leadership in Latin America is evidenced among many activities. He has been secretary-general, second vice president and first vice president of the Council of Latin American Bishops and he is one of the fifteen members of the International Secretaries for Synod of Bishops.

During Vatican II he served as a member of the doctrinal commission and for the episcopal press commission of the Council.

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